

jane kaufman  
recent paintings



"To try and find high, low, right or left in a world that is so well unified by its substance, is thinking, not living."  
(Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*)

Trying to describe one of Jane Kaufman's paintings is like trying to describe a piece of sky; each seems to be a time and space held in the mind but not remembered, unbordered, infused with changing light and distance, colors that cannot be named, but sensed. She rarely talks about her work, and then says only that she sees her paintings not as objects but as "states of being", and that they are, for her, what she is not but would want to be.

These paintings, like the sky, are composed of space, light, movement, time, change—that part of our world that we feel but cannot define. They do not refer to *what* is seen, nor to *how* it is seen, but to aspects of sight that are elementary and unarticulated, to the sense impressions on the retina that are the actual beginnings of vision, to what is "seen" when our eyes are closed. Such phenomena are intrinsic in nature, whereas in a painting they are the conscious product of the artist's hand and the materials used.

Kaufman's paintings are indifferent to formal values. Her most recent work contains no images, no geometry, no brushstroke, no shapes, edges, textures, no isolated or identifiable color—in short, no specific relationships. There is no place to which the eye is directed, and, having no one thing to look at, one looks through the painting, as through a window, at the texture of the world. In this nascent, limitless place, the conscious mind rests while the senses explore.

Her paintings are visual fields, within which imperceptibly sprayed color modulates either

from a center or laterally across the canvas. Sometimes the color, although not specifically nameable, is brilliant, infused with the clear light of noon; sometimes it is a non-color, inaccurately described as "gray". In the latter works, the colors can range across the spectrum, beginning with orange on one end and ending with violet on the other. Since all hues are the same value, very pale and of extremely low saturation, one cannot always "see" the color or its changes, but one does feel them.

Each color change, each movement of light across the surface, each spatial warp, is a minute gesture that alters the entire painting, resembling the natural and unselfconscious, yet essential, act of breathing. No painting is complete, since it is always in search of itself. The light in some of them, for example, is like twilight, or early dawn, which disembodies objects in such a way that they seem tentative, in the process of appearing or dissipating in the atmosphere.

Even the space created is elusive, like the immeasurable crystalline distance of sky and light. The paintings cannot be looked at closely, because they are devoid of detail, and when they are seen at normal viewing distance they appear as vast spaces which offer, paradoxically, access to the intimacy of one's own inner, psychic space.

Kaufman's paintings reveal a state of being in that they, like being, are themselves cyclical. Interaction, flux and change occur between the inside and the outside, the center and the edge, what is flat and what is shaped, simple and com-

plex, bounded and limitless, perceived and imagined. These binary elements lose their specific nature and can be grasped only as elements in the process of becoming.

In the earlier paintings, the actual shaped stretcher provided a form, but the paint denied it. More recently, the stretcher has become a flat rectangle or square which the paint alone shapes. The painting seems to be what it is not. This interaction of reality and implication in her work is a visual metaphor for the artist's life, a way of becoming what she is not.

Though a metaphor, the paintings have no images which reveal themselves with time, nor do they impose themselves upon the viewer. The longer one looks, the less one sees; the longer one looks, the more one feels.

What is, for me, most moving about her work is that the impossibility of remembering one of these paintings in its exactitude draws me back to look again and again, and each experience of it is familiar, and yet changed. I find in the paintings some other sense of time and space, belonging to the world, but stronger than my immediate surroundings. Her work is not an expression of things known, but of things felt, lived, explored, desired. It is not, like objects in the world, grounded in fact, but belongs instead to that different world where dreams are suspended and time ceases to matter.

Marcia Tucker  
Associate Curator

## JANE KAUFMAN

Born in New York City, May 26, 1938. Educated at Cornell University, New York University (B.A.), and Hunter College (M.A.).

## ONE MAN EXHIBITIONS

1968, 1970: A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York.

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1969: "One Man's Choice"—Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas.
- 1970: "Lyrical Abstraction"—Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Conn.
- 1970: "The Invisible Image"—Visual Arts Gallery, New York.
- 1970: "Highlights of the 1970 Season"—Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Conn.
- 1971: "Beaux Arts Exhibition"—Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio.
- 1971: "The Structure of Color"—Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1971: "Lyrical Abstraction"—Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1971: "The American Art Attack"—Brouwersgracht 225, Amsterdam.

## COLLECTIONS

Herbert S. Adler, New York.  
Larry Aldrich, Ridgefield, Conn.  
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Sullivan, New York.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Cover photograph by George Louis Creed.  
For prices inquire at Sales Desk.

## CATALOGUE

All paintings are sprayed acrylic on canvas

1. *4:30 A.M.* 1971. 60" x 60"
2. *6 A.M.* 1971. 66" x 66"
3. *12 P.M.* 1971. 66" x 66"
4. *6 P.M.* 1971. 66" x 66"
5. *7 P.M.* 1971. 66" x 66"
6. *Whispering.* 1971. 70" x 90"
7. *Umberneath.* 1971. 70" x 90"
8. ~~*Ochrearest.* 1971. 90" x 70"~~
9. *Eclipse.* 1971. 90" x 144"
10. *Nascent.* 1971. 82" x 94"
11. *Untitled.* 1971. 90" x 144"
12. ~~*Untitled.* 1971. 78" x 95"~~
13. *Untitled.* 1970. 90" x 70"
14. *Untitled.* 1969. 72"-84" x 12"

Eleven color studies

November 23-December 19, 1971

## Whitney Museum of American Art

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